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RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4201  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: A LOOK INTO THE FEAST OF THE  
SACRIFICE HOLIDAY

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet  
distribution.

¶2. (SBU) During November 28-30, Turkmen celebrated Gurban Bayram, or the Feast of the Sacrifice. Gurban Bayram is the Turkmen version of the Islamic holiday Eid al-Adha, and is widely celebrated across the country. The three-day holiday has been celebrated in Turkmenistan since the country gained Independence in 1991. Pol/Econ Officers were invited to participate in some of the Gurban Bayram events held in Ashgabat.

¶3. (SBU) According to a devout Turkmen Muslim, Gurban Bayram is one of the most important Muslim holidays. During the three-day holiday, Muslims are encouraged to attend seven Gurban Bayram dinners, as a means of having sins forgiven. The main component of the dinner is a dish made from lamb called dograma (pronounced dohrama). The lamb is selected live and then killed according to Halal requirements in preparation for the Gurban Bayram dinner. The meat is boiled for several hours in large metal kettles on open fires to ensure the meat is tender and to provide a broth. The meat is then served dry with pieces of traditional Turkmen bread called churek or as a soup once the broth is added.

¶4. (SBU) Pol/Econ Officer and his family was invited to a neighbor's apartment to participate in a traditional Gurban Bayram dinner. As is Muslim tradition, male and females did not sit together during the meal. Women and children were ushered inside the house and sat on the floor as they ate, while the men were outside sitting at tables. As each male dinner guest prepared to leave the table, the traditional Muslim prayer for the end of a meal was offered in Arabic. According to dinner guests, one of the major requirements of the holiday was that no debts could be incurred to provide the dinner. The dinner was truly a feast and it was obvious that a lot of money was spent on a meal that lasted several hours. In addition, guests often did not stay long, so that they could attend several other dinners at the homes of family and friends.

¶5. (SBU) Another Turkmen tradition on Gurban Bayram is to swing on toweringly tall swings, an act that supposedly rids one of one's sins. In several Ashgabat districts, swings that were approximately two stories tall were set up in the middle of neighborhoods. During the evenings of the holiday, people gathered around the swings to either watch or participate. Those that chose to swing were usually in their teens or 20s, and got on the long board that was the swing in groups of four. Poloff saw several policemen gathered around every swing, probably to ensure safety. At each gathering point there was also a stage, and Poloff heard a variety of music from traditional Turkmen songs performed by orchestras to rock music.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: How Turkmen choose to celebrate Gurban Bayram varies depending on the extent to which a family observes Turkmen traditions. Not everyone sacrifices their own sheep or lamb and not everyone says prayers. Less traditional Turkmen will sometimes make a donation, instead of an animal sacrifice. Some traditions, like the swing, appear to be a mix of Turkmen culture and Islam. Despite the Turkmen President's order in 2008 that the government organize holiday celebrations throughout the country, the holiday retains its family orientation and most festivities seemed to take place at home, with friends and family and a large meal. END COMMENT.  
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